No. 97

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF
WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"Once," she said, in a low, intense tone, "when I was accused, as you accuse me now, you stood by me. You said you would shelter me against the world."

R. of M. G., No. 97.

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THE NIELEN PUBLISHING CO.
Cincinnati, Ohio.

ALICE had been listening to Graham Ericsen, her husband tell about Reeves, the detective, finding a clue to the one who bought the chloroform. He denied that it was Fannie Lester, but said — "The woman answered to your description."

Alice sprang up.

"Mine!" she gasped, and passed with consummate swiftness into superb indignation. "You accuse me! You prejudge me!—you insult me so intolerably, because a detective makes a mistake! Don't you know the worth of their descriptions?

"I knew you didn't love me, but this passes everything—it is incredible! Why didn't you come to me at once if you harbored so vile a suspicion? Reeves wants a victim, and you, who hate me, play into his hands!"

Somehow she seemed to hold the position.

All the evidence against her that had seemed so overwhelming downstairs, dwindled now into dimness and confusion.

He suffered her to go to the end of the room, with a sweep of her blue robe, and a proud uplift of her head, before he said heavily—

"Then you have no fear; I can keep my vow."

She paused. "Your vow?"

"Yes, to find the murderer."

She stood away from him in the shadows.

"You'll follow that clue?"

"Yes."

"But I am not that woman."

He was silent.

"You don't believe me?" A sharpened accent suddenly came into her voice.

"I never have believed you."

"You mean—denial is no use?"

"None."

She came towards him.

"Once," she said, in a low, intense tone, "when I was accused, as you accuse me now, you stood by me—you said you would shelter me against the whole world."

He drew back from her.

The mute repulse made her face change; there was a flash—no more—of what he had called the brute within her.

"When I believed you innocent," he said. "I shall not shelter you now!"

She gave a sort of laugh—a ghastly sound.

"But even if I were guilty, you would not give me up, you know," she said; "you, my husband! An impossible scandal."

"I am past caring for that; I mean to keep my vow to the letter. If you are guilty, you merit no mercy from me. If you are guiltless, you have nothing to fear."

She made a half perceptible movement between him and the door.

"Oh, yes, I have," she said; "that's a copy-book fallacy. Guiltless people have been condemned before now. A woman like me!—there may be hundreds!"

"I shall prove if there be one," said Ericsen. He moved towards the door.

Alice threw herself before it, and fastened her hands on the lock.

"What are you going to do?" she said, with a very hoarse, rapid accent. Ericsen had paused dead.

His lips moved, but no sound came from them.

"You're going to give me up?" she said; "yes?—you mean yes? Now? You are going now?"

He put his hand out as if to move hers. She pushed it aside.

"But you shall not go!" she said, in a strangled

voice. "You shall stay here. I will not live without you! You can't bring back the dead, can you! You can't bring back the dead, can you But I am living. You are mine, and I—I will be yours!"

His movement away from her was almost a stagger.

Again his lips parted as if he were striving to speak, but they closed rigidly.

Her drawn face, her wild eyes, her abandon of passion, were terrible; but more terrible still was her sudden change to seductive entreaty when he seemed to be wavering.

She flung herself at his feet, and the action brought her long hair falling around her like a long glittering mantle.

"Forget the vow!" she said in sweet, passionate tones that might have won a man's soul from him. "Why should it bind you? Forget all the world for me—you did once! I will be your slave—you my master! Don't turn from me! Graham, listen!"

She crept abjectly to him; she stretched up her hands to him; her voice took on a tone of piercing anguish.

"In Heaven's name have mercy! I have lost even your love—I only ask to be near you—to have just that to live for! This is so little. Once you loved me—remember those happy days! I lose all when I lose you."

"You appeal to Heaven! You ask mercy from me!" cried Ericsen in a shaking voice.

"Look," she said, "look at these hands you have so often kissed! Suppose they were red — red with blood, what then? They would still be yours, to kiss at your will!

"If you knelt here and I stood in your place, would I turn from you as you turn from me? I would love

you for ever if you were steeped in crime! Despise me --hate me— loathe me, but keep me at your side!"

"You won your way there with lies. You lay on my heart and destroyed the dearest friend I had! You betrayed me—you dragged me into your foul depths—made every caress an undying shame——"

"I loved you! I loved you!"

"My God! What love!"

Even her insensate soul quailed; even she caught some glimpse of an anguish she could not compass.

The wild eyes changed strangely — a wonder, a question crept into them.

Then she cried out in frantic despair——

"You will not have it so? But what have I done to be cast out? I was mad with your dallying and his stupid thwarting. You would not defy him; he would have parted us in the end—he said that waiting would cool you—that you would change!

"That was what maddened me! How are you the worse? You have been the gainer. Don't give me up—stand by me—against the world. I have only you."

Her voice had sunk to a broken whisper, a glaze had come over her eyes.

Ericsen, with ashen lips, freed himself from her hold.

In an instant she was on her feet; she sprang at him like a savage brute; her long white hands clutching at his throat.

"I hate you," she said, hoarse with fury; "I told you I should! If you will not love me you shall die! I will not be spurned—betrayed."

It was an awful struggle—the man so taken by surprise that for a second or two he lost the advantage of his superior strength.

She had the strength of a madwoman. He won,

of course, but the victory, when it was his, left him dizzy, almost faint.

She, too, seemed physically spent—otherwise she was untamed.

"I'm pretty strong," she said brutally. "You all thought me such a weakling. You've won—but I won the harder battle! You weren't worth it—to set that life against the woman you loved!

"What did he come between us for—why did he tell me you should never marry me? He remembered those words, I daresay, in his dying moments."

"Be silent!" said Ericsen.

She shrank as if from an expected blow, but when she found the blow did not come, she lost her cowed aspect.

"If I'd had that knife here," she said, "you would not be standing there now. Ah, you went off on a wrong scent—I put you on it. And all the time you never even dreamed of me at your side! It was Fenwick—it was a man unknown — you did not think a woman could lose her soul for one kiss from the man she loved!"

He was so overwhelmed, so utterly unstrung, that he hadn't a word in answer.

"What are you going to do?" she said tauntingly. I'm your wife—you can't send me to the gallows, you know——"

And then, because still he was silent, she changed her note.

"Just a life," she half whispered, watching to see the effect of his mood; "one among thousands! And your name——"

He tried, in the chaos within him, to understand what he must do.

His name! Yes, but to let this unbridled murderess loose on the world! Wasn't it just that he should

pay for his share of the guilt, for his folly and blindness? His answer seemed, "Yes."

He had persisted that a beautiful body was a woman with a soul; the man who loved him had seen the devil that lived in that body.

The old stories of demon-possession deepened the confusion in his mind. Was she possessed? Was she responsible?

Then some word, or words, dropped from his lips —he scarcely knew what they were till she caught them up with a cry like that of the lost soul she had called herself——"

"Part—forever! Part! Utterly!"

Then he said quite steadily: "You will be as dead to me as you would be if I gave you up."

"Dead! Dead! Oh, I was so tempted! I couldn't have lived if you had forgotten me!" she cried out in anguish. "Mercy! Mercy!"

She had half fallen to the floor. She knelt to him again.

"You are killing me!" she moaned, "and I can't die! Why didn't I force you to give up searching? It's Reeves—that cursed Reeves."

"No — you — you yourself. You were your own witness!

"You—false in daily life—loving me with a jealous degrading passion — hating all I loved — cruel as death to your child and mine—steeping your senses in drugs—urging me unceasingly to give up a duty!

"You played your vile game well, and you had a fool to play on; but you forced even me to wake at last. Love!" he went on, with terrible passion, "you call that love! God help me!

"What must I be that I could be its object! You have won—for a time! You have won—if you sought

to ruin my life with your own! After one of us leaves this house I shall never see you again!"

She dragged herself nearer to him——

"It is Lilian then—Lilian, who has had her way? Is it she who is parting us?" she said inarticulately.

"Yes — Lilian! She stands between us in very truth at last!"

And leaving her lying there on the floor he went out of the room. She heard him turn the key in the door.

She was a prisoner, then? What did it matter? She had sold her soul in vain!

Chapter 326

IN THE DEPTHS

THE WORDS beat on the wretched woman's brain with incessant iteration—"You are your your own witness!" "You will be dead to me!" —they held the burden of her hopeless misery and abject despair.

She crawled to her feet after what seemed an eternity, reached a chair and sat in it, all huddled together.

Her eyes went round the room with a wild, vague stare. What had she done, after all? Could she escape from this intolerable agony?

Rage did not possess her now. Either it had spent itself in her impotent attack, or it was crushed out by her utter anguish.

But even that anguish was debased — shame had no part in it. She had lost a lover — she had miserably failed; those facts made up the sum of her suffering.

The failure was a bewildering mystery. Her helpless struggle to piece it almost maddened her.

Then she forced herself to her feet and crept from chair to table across the room, till she reached the dressing table — Graham had forgotten, she thought triumphantly, to destroy all the chloral.

Her hands trembled nervelessly as she sought for the hidden bottle. She held it up when she had found it, her red lips writhed into a quivering smile; her cheek paled.

There was plenty in the bottle. She put it down, shuddering, but keeping her hand on it.

Perhaps he would come back to her—perhaps he would let her be his slave. She hid the bottle about her, and threw herself on the bed.

Downstairs, Graham, strung up to that state that is a semi-madness, strove and strove to work out a plan that would hide his dreadful secret.

In vain he racked his brain and his strength—he only found himself going over and over the haunting story, conjuring up pictures, and seeing them so vividly that he almost cried out because he was chained and helpless, and stood by while the horrible drama was played out before him.

He would wrench himself away for a moment, to come back and back to the same thing, to the same slowly-moving pictures that followed each other methodically and lingered that he might gaze his fill.

He pieced together all the gaps in his drama; he filled in all the details—he saw her walking along and stooping to pick up something bright among the dirt and debris.

She smiled; she passed her slim fingers over the blade. The long line of rails stretched before him.

Had no one ever searched them to find the things she had dropped there — the things that would witness against her? He saw them so distinctly; he heard the gentle closing of the carriage door — could no one see them lying beside the rail?

They couldn't be hidden if he could see them so plainly. There is the knife again—away from the other things.

Funny little things they are—bits of paper, and a tiny bottle—they lie half under the rail.

Then he would press his hand over his eyes, and look round the familar room, to assure himself he had not left it, and wasn't going mad.

The night passed slowly on. Alice tossed on her couch, and started up from time to time and listened, and peered into the dark corners where the lamplight did not reach.

What deadly silence! Was he dead downstairs? Was all the world dead and coming round her to tell her so?

She sat up presently, flinging back her long hair, her eyes wild with fear. Her hand clutched the little bottle.

Dead to him—dead! He would never come back again.

She sprang up and crouched where she could not see the gleam of Lilian's golden hair and the dead face behind her.

Her shaking hand held the little bottle to her lips —they would go away if she were asleep, they couldn't torment her then.

Yes, they could, and she couldn't fight them off if she were asleep; she must drive them away utterly.

Graham had gone forever, and they came—he had sent them to look at her and tell her, laughing, that they had conquered.

"Lost!" she whispered—but I can shut them out, they can't follow me!" The sweet lulling drops passed over her white lips. "They are going—they are fading!" she whispered again. Her head fell back, "Oh, God! I have lost!"

It was broad daylight. Somebody came to the study and knocked. Before Graham startled by the

sound, could get to the door, the maid called out, with a strange tone:

"Are you there, sir? Please come at once!"

Ericsen flung open the door. "What!" he said very hoarsely.

"My mistress, sir" —the girl was trembling all over— "in her room. I can't get in, and I could see her on the floor."

Before the words were out of her mouth Ericsen was springing upstairs. The maid followed him.

The first thing he saw—the only thing—when he had unlocked the bedroom door, was Alice lying on the floor, her eyes upturned and glassy, staring blindly into his face as he bent over her.

He swayed when he tried to feel her heart, his hand dropped back to his side, he seemed to lose hold of himself, and suddenly he fell forward over the beautiful dead body.

He opened his eyes languidly. The room was very still; he lay looking at it without any wonder.

He had only physical sensations. The clear fire, the white linen about him, the softness of his pillows, the sunlight glinting across the window—these were what he felt with a sense of comfort.

When a man came to his side——he did not know where from—he looked up at him without surprise; he recognized quite well the kind face, but it brought no poignant recollections; all his faculties lay dormant.

It was quite right, of course, that his cousin Marjorie should be there.

"Well?" said Dr. Hall, "you know me, don't you, Graham?"

"Why, of course I do," said Graham, with a faint wonder at such an absurd question.

"That's all right. The beef-tea, Marjorie, my dear."

And when he had been fed Graham said he should like to go to sleep.

"The best thing in the world," said the doctor in a cheerful tone, and he and Marjorie went away very quietly.

Outside in the passage the girl leaned against the wall with quivering lips and tears in her eyes, and the doctor said fervently——

"Thank God, that's so well over. He has absolutely no recollections at present."

"But when he has—if he gets stronger——"

"He will be better able to bear them, and it may be well to make explanations. I don't suppose that for some days he will care for anything but food and sleep."

Marjorie, with a heart full of thanksgiving, went back to watch, and Dr. Hall passed on downstairs to tell the good news to Mrs. Fairfax then to go to other patients, with the promise to return later.

Graham fulfilled the doctor's hopes. He led that simple animal existence that is the best restorative after a dangerous illness.

He had not an idea yet what he had gone through —how near he had been to death; how by day and by night he had been delirious, and had sometimes almost raved; what fear there had been that if life were maintained reason would either be impaired or overthrown with the first shock of memory.

Instead, there had been this quiet awakening from the unconsciousness succeeding delirium, this deadening

of all mental faculties, and for days the only perfect restorer, incessant sleep.

Even his own prostration of whereabouts aroused no curiosity within him—they, like all else, were in the order of things.

Marjorie was the first to notice when his mind began to work.

It was a little thing that enlightened her, a curious anxious look of his at her dress, which was a light grey with an indefinite pink shade, and an unconscious lifting of the anxiety after his scrutiny.

She took no notice. Of course, both she and her mother had been careful to avoid the slightest token of mourning.

Then he began to have bad nights, to turn from food, and to lie silent and depressed during the day.

Marjorie scarcely stirred from his side, and though in his delirium he had strangely kept his secret, she had a clue to many things he said in that never-to-be-forgotten time when he had come to her.

She had not yet convinced herself, but she had a very strong suspicion, and, in any case, there was something here out of the ordinary.

The girl kept a brave heart and a smiling face, though that faithful heart was wrung daily between passionate pity and dread.

She had not been told that she might answer questions, but suppose Graham asked none, was afraid of betraying himself, and a certain amount of confidence had to be forced, what was she to do then?

The days of apathy were over. What did he think about hour after hour as he lay with closed lips and shadowed eyes?

There came a day when his burden grew too heavy, when the distorted images, the confused mem-

ories, cleared into distinctness, when he could piece things together and weigh consequences, and yet still stumble in the dark, because everything since his last sight of Alice was a blank.

What had happened? Was she dead? Was it a fevered fancy that he had seen her lying at his feet? Why couldn't he remember anything since? What had he said? What did any one know?

If he began to question, how could he be sure of keeping his secret? He knew how prostrate he was, how little power he had of guarding look or word.

But every minute deepened his oppression, till he grew restless under it.

Marjorie from her seat on the hearth, listened to his every movement, to his weary sighs, as if no position could give him ease of mind or body.

Yet when she came to him and asked whether he wanted anything, he answered monotonously,

"No—nothing."

She returned to her place, and he went over and over every word of that last terrible scene, saw every look, heard the rustle of Alice's dress as she swept away from him, felt the savage clutch of her hands, and shuddered again as he had shuddered then.

Dead! Was she dead by her own hand? Did they say so? Or had he done it? Did they accuse him?

Where was she? And before he had finished this question, he was lifting himself and calling to his cousin.

She was at his side directly and he clung to her hands and looked up at her speechlessly.

The drops were on his brow, his lips were trembling uncontrollably.

Marjorie passed her arm about him and held him softly, till he found voice to whisper—

"I can't bear it! I must speak. She isn't dead—I

haven't killed her!"

"Graham, hush! Don't have such a terrible thought as that!" said Marjorie, steadying her voice with calmness. "You can't think so really—it isn't true. You have brooded too long if you can hold such a thought."

"I didn't watch her—I left her alone—and I knew —I knew—— But there's time yet."

"Time for what, dear? Do you think it's all a dream?"

Something in the tone—perhaps its pitying tenderness—seemed to arrest him, to calm his excitement some.

He looked up into the young face and sighed.

"I've had so many dreams," he said. "No, perhaps this wasn't one of them. Was it?"

He held his breath for the answer, though in his inmost soul he knew what it would be.

"No, it was real," said Marjorie; "she had died hours before you were sent for — before anyone knew about it."

He drew himself from her and leaned back, covering his eyes with his hands. Marjorie went on in the same quiet way—

"The maid for mother and me. Dr. Hall had already arrived We brought you here; we all thought it best."

"How long ago?"

"Three weeks."

"Three weeks!" He dropped his hands—it had seemed to him but the other day. What might not have happened while he lay here blind and deaf! "Three weeks!" he repeated. "But how is it I don't remember—that it's all a blank."

"You have been very ill, Graham — part of the time delirious. When you came to yourself I think for

some days you scarcely recalled anything, so it would seem to you but the other day."

"Delirious! You mean, I raved."

"Sometimes, at first."

"Who was here — you? What did I say?" he asked, half excitedly.

"Only mother and I have nursed you—I mostly. You talked about your boyhood — when you and I were together — and the early days with Alice, about Lilian, and — and home matters, troubles I knew of, or guessed about."

She spoke hesitatingly, as touching on wounds still bleeding.

And then, though it was the truth, it was not all the truth. He had talked of these things, but there had been times when he had begun strange words and pulled himself up; or Marjorie herself had checked him.

But there was no necessity to tell him this. He was quite excited enough as it was—too much so when she paused, and some strong revulsion of feeling made him half faint and not able to speak.

There was a silence; and the gnawing fear at her heart grew into almost certainty.

Why this emotion—this relief—for it was relief — if there had not been something he might have betrayed in his delirium?

He first broke the silence—not moving from his position, with his face half hidden.

"The rest," he said—his voice sounded exhausted —"what was done? Where — where," the voice failed altogether.

Had they laid her, blood-guilty as she was beside her spotless child?

"She lies," said Marjorie slowly, "in the churchyard at Earl's Monckton—not with Lilian."

She thought he muttered something; it sounded like "Thank God!" Her heart stood still.

"I knew what you would wish," she added, almost inaudibly — and what exactly she meant by the words neither he nor she knew.

"Mother was there," she went on; "I stayed with you. There had been an inquest" —he lifted his face suddenly; he seemed to hold himself together only by a stupendous effort.

"Go on," he said hoarsely, when she paused. "I can bear it—I will bear it. An inquest — yes? What did they say?"

"You were lying here unconscious—no one knew anything save you. Dr. Hall stated that she had taken chloral—he had to say he believed there were troubles—so had the maid; they thought there might have been a quarrel—that she had taken an overdose by mistake; she may have done that."

"The verdict!" he said feverishly.

"Misadventure—no one was blamed."

"Blame—blame—what would it matter?" he muttered.

He threw himself down again, quivering from head to foot.

There was no breakdown — overwhelmed with some passion of emotion, he yet, shattered as he was physically, kept himself somehow from betraying himself; as if he feared that, once he gave way, he would lose all control over himself.

But the girl was more frightened than if he had broken down—this silent struggle was far worse.

Had she lost the power that, in his delirium, had so often soothed him into quietude?

Or was there something here she dared not touch —that must have its way?

She got hold of his hand, and sat, with straining heart, caressing it—she could not tell with what effect —for a long time. It was all she could do for him—until he chose to give up his secret.

When he had lain quiet for some minutes she bent over him.

"Graham," she said softly.

He drew her down to him—she felt his lips on her cheek. It was sweet to her—the mute thanks— the mute renewal of the dear childish ties; but she was still shut out, still some barrier hid his soul from her.

She could only whisper, feeling as if her heart would break, "Try and live for us!"

He made no answer. She lifted herself slowly—her tears were falling at last, her bitter scalding tears.

And he took no notice—did not know.

She went back to her seat by the fire; the chill winter dusk had fallen, the fire had sunk. She knelt down to make it up.

The world had talked over that startling death of Alice's—and this, too, Marjorie had kept back. It had crowded to the inquest, and listened to the meagre details.

It had reverted to another inquest when the beautiful dead woman had been a prominent witness, and once again the old story had ben raked up and discussed?

The Ericssens didn't get on? Was that all? Had that and a quarrel struck the man down almost to his death? What could he have said if he had been able to speak?

Why hadn't he remembered—he probably knew of it — the chloral, and removed it? What had passed between them last night that he could not think of so simple a precaution?

What had he said or done to drive the unhappy woman to suicide? The servants said that something was wrong—and they must know.

And the world found time in the midst of this tearing to pieces to call and inquire after the man who might be a martyr or a tyrant — they did not know which.

They filled his room with flowers — they loaded him with sympathy. Of all things on earth they would have liked to get him somehow into their power and force him to speak.

But he did not speak even to his nearest and dearest — he relapsed into his impenetrable silence, and wished he were lying with Lilian in the quiet country churchyard.

This morbid longing, which hampered the doctor's efforts, might have been swept away if he could have opened his heart to anyone; but for once in his life the one creature he could have confided in—Marjorie—was the last he would have chosen; he felt that she already knew too much.

Mrs. Fairfax was excessively concerned about this listlessness; she had been speaking to Dr. Hall, and she repeated his remarks to her daughter.

"What did he say?" the girl asked.

"He was a little anxious about it, but he thought it was partly physical, and would mend.

" 'He will pull himself up when he is stronger,' he said; 'I know him—he has plenty of fibre.' 'And plenty of love, doctor,' I answered.

Marjorie smiled. Between "fibre" and the subtle force of the love about him, Ericsen once more fulfilled the doctor's assertions; he braced himself to face the life he had loathed.

One day, his first out of the room, he called Mar-

jorie to him.

"Will you do something for me?" he said.

"Anything, of course."

He smiled. "Have you or Aunt Cathie got my private properties? You once said you had brought them here."

"Mother has them. She took everything out of the study drawers, and put them in your old school desk. Do you want it?"

"Yes; but that won't be all that I want you to do for me."

"Very well — I'm always at your service, you know."

She brought him the desk—everything else at his house had been left in the care of the maid and the other servants till he was able to see to things himself.

Then he asked for writing materials.

It took him a long time to write a short note and fill in a check; when he had managed that, and addressed the envelope, he said again: "Marjorie."

She was at hand directly. He held the letter to her, and she read the address—"D. R. Reeves."

"Will you take that for me, now?" Ericsen said; "you must see Reeves himself, and, Marjorie, don't tell anyone—I'm closing the account, that's all."

"I'll make it all right, dear—take care of yourself while I'm gone; mother won't mind where I go for you."

In five minutes he heard her leave the house—she would take a taxi further on.

Mr. Reeves was, of course, not surprised when told that a lady wished to see him; he directed that she should be shown in.

"I have come from my cousin, Mr. Ericsen," said Marjorie, when she was inside the private room. "H

sent me with this letter."

Mr. Reeves took the letter, and asked kindly after his sometime client; then he read the note, the handwriting so unlike Ericsen's caligraphy that the detective would hardly have known it.

A check over and above the rendered account was enclosed, with a few words of thanks—nothing else.

To Reeves that silence was painfully significant; it acknowledged that he was right; it was the confirmation of his conjectures about Alice's sudden death.

He alone could have thrown light on that death, which remained still something of a mystery.

He wrote a few lines to Ericsen, enclosed a receipt, and gave the letter to Marjorie.

He made only a few remarks of a general nature —never referred once to Alice or to his business with Ericsen.

When he had seen Marjorie to her cab, he sat down in his room thoughtfully.

"It's an awful business," he said to himself. "I wonder wil be ever really get over it? I've come across nothing like it. We shall never know some things about it—how exactly it was done. Well, she has failed—there was no 'misadventure," I'll swear.

"And she must have shown him what she was, else to the end of time he'd never believe me. But he knew it was possible. I'm sorry—awfully sorry—but somehow it's often the best felows that get linked with the worst women."

Was there, then, no one to grieve for the beautiful woman who had died such a miserable death, who might have had her wrongs and her mortifications—there must have been two sides to this quarrel—if quarrel there had been.

But Alice had lived, as she died, to herself—out of

all those who were glad of her invitations, men who admired her, women who copied her, she had not made one friend.

She left no haunted place behind her. She was forgotten—the only one in the world who never forget her was the man who had been her last husband.

Chapter 327

A WOMAN'S STORY

O YOU are to travel, Graham? Well, whenever you are tired of loneliness, there is always a place for you here." Those had been Catherine Fairfax's parting words to Graham Ericsen; and even since, he had come back again and again to the only people in the world he loved.

His own home was broken up, its relics were in Marjorie's charge.

The Croft, which he had hoped to make an ancestral home, he could not bear—it was shut up.

He was possessed by a consuming restlessness that drove him from place to place; but the solitude, the necessity to escape from himself, drove him back as infallibly to the one place where he knew he was wanted.

But this wandering, unsettled life did not satisfy him; after a few years he grew sick of it. Where was it to end?

What was the use of going to new places and straightway filling them with his own unhappy associations, the reflex of his own mind?

He had to leave them, and the same thing happened again. He wanted fresh associations; he wanted a resting place; peace, if he could not have happiness.

He was getting into a morbid state, harping eternally on one thing, sinking back into his old idea that he too had shed blood.

Marjorie Fairfax seemed to be suffering almost as much as Graham Ericsen. She had always loved him since they were children together. And now, that he

was so very unhappy, she loved him more than ever.

"Oh, I wish I could bring that happy boyish smile back to his face," she said to her mother one afternoon as they lingered over their tea. "It is cruel to let him go on like that with both of us not making much of an effort to help him."

Mrs. Fairfax looked at her daughter. It was a look of deep concern. It was a worried look. Marjorie was wasting away slowly but surely.

"My dear child," she began, her voice quivering, "I wish I could do more than I already have done."

Tears came into the girl's eyes.

"I—I know you have done your best to make poor Graham see the bright side of life, mother," she answered, choking back a sob. "But I love him so. I can't stand——"

"There, there now, dear," the mother soothed as she reached over and petted Marjorie's hand. "Don't cry. I'll have a talk with Graham as soon as he comes. I expect him to-morrow. Perhaps I can brush the unhappy cobwebs from his mind I'll try at least."

Marjorie Fairfax made a desperate effort to dry her tears and smiled rather pitifully. New hope was rising in her heart. She had faith in her mother.

The next day Graham Ericsen called. Marjorie fled upstairs to her room in order to give her mother a chance to talk with him alone. As he was ushered into the drawing room he did not seem to have any life in him.

Wearily he sank into a chair and scarcely noticed that his Aunt Cathie took a seat close to him. He did not look up until he heard her voice.

"You are not looking a bit well, Graham," she was saying. "You ought to get a grip in yourself."

His lusterless eyes met hers.

"Oh, what's the use," he said with a shrug of his shoulders. "I really haven't anything to live for. I believe I would be better off dead."

"Graham Ericsen!" his aunt cried. "What a very wicked thing to say."

"It may be wicked, Aunt Cathie. But I surely do mean it."

"No, you don't mean it," she returned half angrily. "If you did I'd disown you. Only a coward will use such language. Be a man and fight back. You must fight back. If you don't——"

"Listen," he interrupted, his voice filled with pain. "What have I to fight for? I am done with love. I am done with women."

Mrs. Fairfax thought of her unhappy daughter who loved this man.

"If you had gone through what I have," Ericsen spoke again, "you would not care to live either, Aunt Cathie. My suffering is beyond endurance."

For a long moment the woman hesitated. She appeared to be fighting a sudden impulse.

"No man or woman ever suffered what I did," she said at last. "I could tell you a story that would make your trouble insignificant by comparison."

A new light came into Graham's eyes as they rested on his aunt.

"You——you have suffered?" he cried, incredulous.

"God knows I have, my boy," she said.

"And you could tell a story, Aunt Cathie?"

"Yes, a tragic story, Graham. And you shall hear it if you promise on your word of honor not to repeat a single word to a living soul."

"I promise," Ericsen said, laying a hand over his heart.

"The reason I am willing to reveal this chapter—this hidden chapter of my younger life is this:" Mrs. Fairfax declared as she leaned forward and placed a hand affectionately on Ericsen's knee. "It will serve as an object lesson. It will teach you that our life is what we chose to make it.

"It will teach you to remember that we have no right to destroy the life God gave us. For no matter how fate may treat us, there is always something to live for. There is always someone to love us.

"My case was without a parellel. You only lost the woman you loved. I lost the man I loved. I lost my father and mother because I loved unwisely but too well. And I lost the one thing a woman should prize highly. I lost my honor."

Mrs. Fairfax sat there with her eyes half closed, and before her rose the shadows of the past.

She could see them vividly as they danced and mocked her. They were the phantoms of dead years that sometimes smiled but more often reproached.

She also had dipped into the fountain of folly, but she had been sinned against more than she had sinned herself.

"I was the only child of loving parents," she began at length. "I was born in a small town in Southern Ireland. My ancestors had fought and bled for this great country of ours. The feeling of intense hatred against any nation that wronged Ireland had come to my father as an heirloom.

"He was an Irishman to the very core of his soul. When the rebellion in Ireland broke out, he remained true to the principles of every Irish gentleman.

"My mother often told me how miserable he was when the English finally triumphed. His hatred of the English was fierce. For years after the war he would

not speak to a man if he came from any State which had been arrayed against his beloved Ireland in the horrible war.

"And this hatred did not decrease with the years that followed. One of the things I remember most vividly about my father, was his unreasonable aversion to the English.

"He used to plead with me never to marry one of them. And I promised that I wouldn't.

"At the age of seventeen I had my dreams like every other young girl. I was looking forward to the coming of the man who would ask me some day to be his wife. By nature I was romantic and my ambitions were high.

"The fact that I lived in a small town precluded the possibility of meeting many young men who appealed to me. Most of them were farmers of the shiftless sort, who led a hand-to-mouth existence.

"My mother, having been married when quite a young girl, seemed determined to find a husband for me somewhere and somehow.

"She had an idea that every girl ought to be married before she was twenty. Without my knowledge and consent she picked out a husband for me. He happened to be a rich farmer well past forty-five.

"There was a rumor afloat that his father had been a spy for the English during the war. He himself, at the first meeting, impressed one as being a sneak. But my mother hadn't any scruples about that, no matter how fervently I expressed my dislike of the man's character.

"She insistently invited him to the house and he at once began to make love to me. There was something about the man's personality that was repulsive to me.

"Then the day came when more amicable rela-

tions were re-established between the Irish and the English. Drummers from London and Liverpool again visited our little town.

The small merchants looked forward to their visits, for it meant the building up of a new and more prosperous business.

"Among them was a very handsome young man, also an Englishman, who created a most favorable impression. The merchants took an instant liking to him in spite of the fact that he came from England.

"They held their orders for him, not only because he sold them the goods they liked, but also because he had an extremely pleasant way of telling witty stories. The girls of the town welcomed him. He had big brown eyes and nice manners.

"He usually wore gaudy scarfs and a large diamond ring as he paraded the streets. His up-to-date way of dressing made him the embodiment of a woman's ideal of man's elegance.

"And he did not, upon acquaintance, disappoint the extravagant expectations raised by those glories. There was not a soul in the town who suspected that this man was a wolf in sheep's clothing.

"He knew his power. He appreciated the advantage in being a bird of passage, and he laid siege to a girl's heart with assurance and stormed it with audacity.

"Being unusually accomplished and a musician, he was invited into a good many homes by the merchants who traded with him. He could play the piano beautifully and sang sentimental ballads in a way that would have done credit to a vaudeville actor.

"At first I paid little attention to him, because I had not met him personally. I deemed it improper to speak to him on the street because we had not been in-

troduced.

"But way down in my heart was longing to meet this social paragon. I was to have my wish, so cruel fate had willed.

"Ah, if I had only died before I listened to his soft persuasive voice and promises he never had the least intention to keep. What mental tortures I endured because of that man, no one will ever know."

At this point Mrs. Fairfax paused for breath.

It was very evident that the telling of this story affected her not a little, for she was constantly swallowing something that persistently rose in her throat.

"Do not go any further," Graham Ericsen said sympathetically. "You are distressing yourself unnecessarily."

"No—no," the woman cried, with a deprecating gesture of her hand. "If I stopped now you wouldn't learn the moral in this bitter lesson. Let me go on."

Mrs. Fairfax stared dreamily into space for a moment, then continued:

"One day my mother sent me to the general merchandise store where we traded to get a few articles for the household. When I entered the handsome young drummer was busily engaged exhibiting his samples.

"As soon as he saw me, he stepped back courteously to allow the storekeeper to wait on me.

"I could feel his dark eyes on me, though my back was turned. I hardly knew why I grew so confused as I gathered up my packages and turned hastily to leave the store.

"In doing so, I dropped one of the articles — a package of shredded wheat biscuits it was, which my mother was very fond of.

"With the grace of a cavalier of the old school, he stooped and picked it up, then handed it to me with a

bow. When I raised my eyes shyly to his, he smiled.

"Ah, what a smile he had. He could have coaxed an angel from Heaven to do his bidding, had his character been unknown.

"For a few moments I stood there, trying vainly to throw off the spell he had cast over me. There was something almost irresistible in that smile of his. Then he strode slowly over to the door and held it open for me to pass out.

"From that moment on I was not the same girl. I thought of him by day and dreamed of him by night. Ah, how well I remember it.

"I found out that he was to stay over a week in our little town, and I was very glad, although I had no real reason to be. He had been merely kind to me without trying to flirt. And he could be kind without being offensive like those borish farmer lads.

"It was his gentlemanly conduct and unusual dignity which had impressed me most.

"The one thought that dwelled in my mind was that he was different from all the other men I had met. He had all the admirable qualities the local beaus seemed to lack.

"One evening I decided to take a stroll through the town. As I passed the hotel I noticed him sitting on the veranda. I walked on rapidly, although I felt instinctively that he had risen quickly and was following me.

"By the time I had reached the last house on the street, he caught up with me.

" 'You look lonesome,' he said with that wonderful smile of his. 'If you have no objection, I'll accompany you for a little ways.'

"I was so excited, I don't remember what I said."

Continued in next number

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